

RONDUPARA

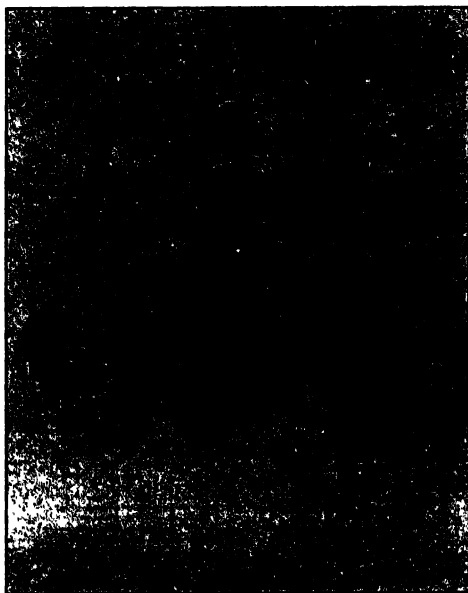
(A Saga of Patriotism and Heroism)
1822 - 1881.



Milton S. Sangma

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PREFACE

This small book contains a first hand account of the military expeditions of the British against the A-bengs living in the middle west and north-western parts of Garo Hills between the years, 1882-1881. The accounts and reports left by the British officers were very fascinating and absorbing. The British officers themselves headed the expeditions and day to day detailed accounts were made by them which were officially submitted to their higher authorities. As such, these accounts were very authentic and exhaustive. By going through them, one gets a real picture of the whole events that took place at that point of time and if one is familiar with the places and geographical features and the lives of the people, it made an absorbing reading.

However, these accounts were one sided. They wrote what they saw and what they knew from their points of view. In this way, it is only one side of the coin. The other side of the coin is not shown in these accounts. On the other hand, it is very difficult now to get the correct picture of the other side as the present generations of people heard only over-exaggerated versions. For example, the people of Rondupara said that the Garo warriors were so tall and strong that one Garo warrior alone could knock down ten to twelve British soldiers in their hand to hand fight.

Despite this biasness which is inherent in human nature, these accounts tell us about the history of our forefathers and their struggles which may, in some ways work as an inspiration to the present generation. It is in this spirit that I commend this small work to the readers.

Dated :- Tura, May 2012.

Milton S. Sangma
Tura.

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CHAPTER - I

THE A·BENG UPRISINGS AGAINST THE BRITISH.

Location :

Rondupara, a solitary A·beng village, unknown and unsung by all and sundry, is located at the extreme north-western part of West Garo Hills district on the bank of the Ringge river between Dadenggre town and Chibinang bazar. Lieutenant Belli in the account of his military expedition against Rondupara in 1835, described Rondupara as "a village or rather a string of hamlets which live both sides of the Ringge river for atleast a mile and a half, and contains at the lowest computation not less than 1500 souls." However, since sometime past, not a single house has been seen standing at the original hillock of Rondupara village as they have been scattered over wide areas in the neighbourhood as wont with the Garos for the purpose of jhumming and horticulture.

First British Military Expeditions against A·bengs, 1822-25 :

The A·beng Division of the Garos occupying the north-western parts of Garo Hills were the first to have had encountered with the British. The British without any shred of authority either de jure or de facto, for the first

time levied taxes on them in 1822-23 with 196 Narainee rupees annually which was increased to 200 Narainee rupees in 1824-25.

Shortly after, David Scott, the Commissioner despatched a local corps under the Garo Sarbarakar, Mirza Bund Ali Beg to reduce the A-beng Garos to order as they denied their allegiance to the British Government. This Sarbarakar or officer-in-charge of Garo frontiers seemed to have accomplished his task as all the A-beng Nokmas of the areas submitted and agreed to pay the stimulated amount of taxes through their own respective Nokmas.¹ These A-beng villages were - Rondupara, Ribugiri, Chisikgiri, Dersigiri, Dadenggiri, Kantananggiri, Magulpara, Debangiri, Channapara Mronggiri, Boldagiri, Bikonggiri, Jangrapara, Cherangiri, Kangragiri, Tepatanggiri, Champakpara, Dangapara, Chanangpara, Majugiri and Rabongiri, Markagiri, Lengpara, Kalapara, Rakopara, Khosurpara, Sindapara, Dindangiri, Ranggugiri, Buripara, Chakapara, Dongrangpara, Dingsapara, Mandapara, Tangripara, Juchapara, Bichodokpara, Konchangpara, Malugiri, Sangbuchigiri, Buripara (2nd), Romagiri, Domrigiri, Ramrangiri and Mansanggiri.² But since these A-beng villages were not yet properly brought under British control, they continued to evade paying their revenues upto 1832 when their arrears amounted to 4979 Narainee rupees.

Second British Military Expedition against Rondupara, 1832-33 :

To give vent to their anger for imposition of taxes,

the A·bengs demonstrated their insubordination by burning the haats and villages in the frontier and even threatening to murder any person who might be sent to collect the revenue.³ The A·beng Garos of Rondupara cruelly murdered four Burmese (who are now known as Mans) hunters who had strayed into their hills for shooting wild elephants for their tusks in November 1833. The British immediately sent military expedition against Rondupara. But according to Major A.Davidson, Principal Agent to Governor-General, the murder of four Burmese was not the immediate cause of British incursion upon Rondupara. The real cause was the insubordination of the Garos for some years past to the British and their annually threatening to invade the adjacent plains around Singimari and Karaibari Zamindari.⁴

A force of a company of Sebundies (local soldiers) and 100 Burmese (Man) settlers at Singimari under the command of Mirza Bund Ali Beg was immediately sent to compel the Garos of Rondupara to surrender and to pay up their arrears. The forces proceeded via Tikrikilla and then stockaded at Cherangre village and then commenced clearing the road towards Rondupara with 120 labourers. The labourers on the road were at once attacked by the Garos but the British soldiers repulsed them with one soldier and two Burmese killed and two soldiers and one Burmese wounded. The Garos on their part, sustained a loss of about 25 men. However, after the fateful event, the Garo Nokmas surrendered, agreed to pay up their arrears and affirmed that the murderers of the four Burmese hunters were killed in the attack. The

British Government then inflicted a fine of Rs.1000/on the Rondupara village for the crime committed.. Although the Nokmas entered into Written Agreement with the British for the payment of their arrears and fines, they on one excuse or another evaded paying up their arrears and fines as agreed upon by them. This act was deliberate on the part of the Garos as they never wanted any external power to dictate terms to them.

Third Military Expedition, 1834-35 :

In the winter season of 1834-35, Lieutenant Brodie was deputed to enquire into the reasons for non-payment of arrears of revenues and of insubordination. On arrival at Bangalkhata, the A-beng Nokmas bordering the plains tendered their submission. On enquiry, the people told Lieut. Brodie that their revenues were paid to the Nokmas but the Nokmas withheld their transmission to the Government in defiance.

After long persuasion and then threat only that the Nokmas with great reluctance paid up only the current and preceeding years' dues and the fines levied on the village of Rondupara for the murder of four Burmese hunters. Then Lieut. Brodie made arrangements that the revenues should not be paid through the Nokmas but direct to Mongring Lasker who would be responsible for the whole amount. Payments should also be made in company's rupees instead of Narainee rupees. Even after this settlement, only some Nokmas paid taxes most irregularly and most reluctantly.

Fourth Military Expedition, 1847 :

In a spirit of vengeance against imposition of taxes, the A·bengs under the leadership of Rondupara village massacred the Nokma of Risogiri and his family for his attempts to collect taxes. A party of sepoy was at once sent to Risogiri village. On March 19, 1847, the sepoy proceeded via Rompani to Risogiri but soon were attacked by a large body of Garos who killed the interpreter named Asina and severely wounded the guide and the commander. After a fierce battle, the Garos were repulsed but the British sepoy retreated as the resistance appeared to them of a very serious nature. Then the British postponed their military operations as the rainy season set in. The British Government however, took precautionary measures to protect the plains people by increasing the guards at the foot of the hills to prevent their egress to the plains.

Fifth Military Expedition, 1848 :

Despite these tight measures, situation worsened which demanded immediate British intervention. In January, 1848, Lieut. Belli was ordered to commence military operations against these refractory A·bengs led by Rondupara under command of Capt. Reynolds. Accordingly, Lieut. Belli proceeded from Singimari to Bhogamara and summoned all the A·beng Nokmas to help him in cutting roads to Rondupara via Risogiri. But all his endeavours in persuading the Nokmas to help him in cutting the roads were of no avail. Therefore, Lieut. Belli threatened the A·beng Garos that they were liable to

severe punishment for their belligerence, as every Nokma of the Tributary Mahal was obliged, under the agreement they had entered into, to render every assistance when occasion required. Yet, since he failed to convince them, Lieut. Belli gave them their dismissal by telling them that they should have no more communication with him until he visited them in their own villages, backed by the sepoys. Next day, Lieut. Belli commenced the road by placing other labourers on the job under sufficient guards to protect them against any attack or surprise of the Garos. However, in the evening of the first day of the work, Lieut. Belli was favoured by the visit at his tent of three or four A-beng Nokmas of the nearest villages who offered their services and that of their followers which Lieut. Belli readily accepted.

On the following day, these Nokmas brought about 50 followers and with their assistance, Lieut. Belli contrived to complete a very tolerable day's work. On his return to his camp, Lieut. Belli was met by several other Nokmas who came to tender their services, and on the fourth day, there was not a single Nokma of the neighbourhood of Singimari who did not supply his quota of workmen towards clearing the road. On the evening of the fourth day of his work, Lieut. Belli received news from the messengers he had sent to the Garos of Bangalkhata regions that their Nokmas would meet Lieut. Belli at Bangalkhata for the purpose of their submission and so he proceeded there without delay, leaving the construction of the road to Mirza Lasker and the Nokma of Rompani.

According to Lieut. Belli, the Nokmas joined him so

soon in the construction of the roads after their decided refusal as they saw his determination to carry out the project and felt that they could not hold out when Belli had ready access to their other villages and could with ease bring up the supplies. Only the Nokma of Ribugiri, Phelleng did not turn up.

The route from Bhogamara to Bangalkhata lies for the most part over low hills and swampy grounds at the base. These swamps were caused by the flooding of the Jinjiram which make them incapable of cultivation. The exact boundaries of Kalumalupara pargana and these A-beng areas have never been laid down before Becket in 1872-73, and whenever a plainsman cultivates, the zamindar claimed the revenues although Belli is fully satisfied that he has no right to it.

About six miles from Bhogamara en route to Bangalkhata are the ruins of the palaces and city of the Raja Bissondor, which must have been a place of no small importance in days long gone by. It flourished long before the occupation of the country by the Moghuls. The same topography continues till Bangalkhata which is situated on the banks of the Jinjiram and joined by the Ringge river a little below.

Lieut. Belli's Interview with the Nokmas at Bangalkhata in 1848 :

Lieut. Belli summoned all the Nokmas of that region to Bangalkhata and impressed upon them the need to cooperate with the Government in its future plans and

policies. The assembled Nokmas having no other alternative, assured him of the good faith of the Garos. However, there were still few Nokmas who could not reconcile to this situation. One of such, was the Nokma of Ribugiri. There upon Lieut. Belli proceeded against the recalcitrant village of Ribugiri, the Nokma of which, refused all overtures of pardon and forgiveness, if they would come in and surrender the murderers.

March against the Ribugiri village, January, 1848 :

Before Belli marched against the Ribugiri village, he halted for five days at Bangalkhata in order that the Nokmas might clear the road. On the 24th January, 1848, it was reported that the road has been cleared and so Belli and his party commenced their march accordingly and reached the Buldagiri village on the same day. While at Buldagiri, Belli received reports that the whole villagers of Ribugiri have fled. He then entered into some sorts of arrangements with the Nokmas who consented to all the proposals of Belli and also agreed to bring all the people of Ribugiri who fled away, to him on the following day at Bangalkhata. Then finding no probability of any opposition, he returned to Bangalkhata next day to wait for the results of his negotiations with the Nokmas. After waiting the prescribed time, the Nokmas did not make their appearance at Bangalkhata nor sent him any explanation. Therefore, Lieut. Belli decided to proceed at once to Ribugiri village and further inside and make the enquiry by himself. Accordingly, he commenced his march against Ribugiri for the second time on the 27th January, 1848 and then to proceed further.

The route into these A-beng villages, and by which all of them frequented to the Bangalkhata Hat, lies from Bangalkhata for the first two miles over a high plain to the Burmese settlement arranged by David Scott on the Ringge river. Marching along the west bank of Ringge river for about a quarter of a mile, Belli and his party came to an extra-ordinary ridges of granite rocks which seemed to form a natural boundary between the hills country and the plains. The same extra-ordinary convulsion which threw up this ridge of stone has left a doorway through it, which though narrow for elephants, could easily be passed by any other laden animals. About half a mile up the same bank of the river, the road crosses at a ford immediately below the first Falls of the Ringge river. The Fall however, commences some hundred or more yards above, and the river is seen dashing along over every impediment, till it reaches the barrier, when with one mighty effort it leaps into tranquility below, from whence, it winds its way quietly along till it finds repose in the waters of the Jinjiram. The route from here lies up the east bank, sometimes along the edge of the water through massive boulders of granite and at others over the precipitous slopes of the small hills that restrain the course of the impetuous river. The road never leaves the margin except below Buldagiri village. Belli encamped on the west bank of Ringge above Buldagiri, over a little hill. The village of Buldagiri is situated on the east bank of the Ringge river on a tableland overlooking the river. It contained about 13 big houses with a population of about 130 persons. The Nokma was found to be a fine old man with honest countenance.

March against Chisikgiri :

From Belli's camp, the road laid along the western bank of the Ringge river for about a mile where it makes a detour to the east of the road till the village of Chisikgiri. The road between Buldagiri and Chisikgiri was excellent and no ridges of rock or high boulder obstructed the road.

The hills Lieut. Belli and his team passed over were covered with jungle. Low grass interspersed with old cotton plants and tall grasses thickly studded with quick growing shrubs and trees formed into forest jungle. And when such forest jungles were left untouched for about seven or eight years, the Garos cleared them for their jhum cultivation.

The village of Chisikgiri, near which, Belli and his party encamped, was prettily situated on the east bank of the Ringge river but few houses were also seen on the west bank. In between these two localities, cane suspension bridge was constructed across the Ringge river for their own convenience. Lieut. Belli saw several such suspension bridges in different parts of the river to enable them to pass over to their jhum fields. The old Nokma of Chisikgiri was liked by Belli as he helped in cutting and clearing the road and also in bringing up provisions for the sepoy. He and his co-villagers were found to be most useful to Belli.

March against Rondupara :

After having tasted little or no resistance, Belli now

determined to continue his victorious military campaign against the Rondupara village which still showed no sign of surrender to the British. It still remained defiant.

There were two routes from Chisikgiri to Rondupara. One route was along the bank of the Ringge river, while the other was over the ridge of hills. The first was impassable for elephants and ladden animals, being blocked up with ridges of rock and boulders, between which only individuals could pass. The bed of the river was also impracticable and Rondupara would be impregnable from that side. The other route over the hill, which though a little abrupt was still far from bad. Descending to the bank of the Ringge river, it again fell into the old road which continued along the margin to Rondupara. Rondupara was a superb village at that time or rather a string of hamlets which lived on both sides of the Ringge river for atleast a mile and a half with a population of around one thousand and half persons.

The most popular man of this village was Monkual, though he was not a Nokma of any kind. But being a clever intriguing man, he had gradually usurped the authority of the old hereditary chief or Nokma, who in his dotage, and his heir and son-in-law being weak in intellect, people have chosen a man capable of giving good counsels and managing them. The people as a matter of custom submitted any important subject for the consideration of the old Nokma but if his opinion was at variance with the opinion of Monkual, the latter's view prevailed upon the former. Lieut. Belli wrote, "The power this man possesses over the people is astonishing and his

will is law. If we can secure his good faith, we need fear no further outbreak of the Dusannee" or A·bengs.

As Belli intended to make Rondupara his head quarters during his residence at the A·beng country, he pitched their camp upon a hill at the top of the village, as it was well-calculated for defence in case of any treacherous night attack. He felt that a few sepoy would be sufficient to protect their baggage and standing camp when they proceeded against Ribugiri, another independent A·beng village. Belli managed to get ready assistance from the villages in erecting temporary sheds for the sepoy and half a dozen stout Garos stepped forward into Belli's tent and constructed a machang or split bamboo floor for sleeping for Belli. While they were working with their mil·am or doubled-edged sword alongside Belli, thought came to him that how easy it would be for any of them to settle his account and dash into the jungles, when they would never more be seen but treachery of this kind formed no part of the Garos' character. Thus Rondupara was occupied with little or no resistance.

Ascending to the top of the elevation on February 1, 1848, Belli could see the hills miles around cleared for jhuming and obtained clear view of the surrounding areas. At the feet was the Ringge river whose course could be traced only as far as Ribugiri. To the east 8 or 9 miles distant, the Tikree Duar (Tikrikilla) hills rise abruptly above those of the A·beng villages which gradually decreased in the further south-west. As far as the eye could reach to the south, the hills appeared to be of the same uniform appearance as those they were on and to have been at

some time or another under jhum cultivation of the independent Garos. According to Belli's calculation, he was then 25 miles from the plains as the crows fly. In those areas, Belli could discover no sterile precipitous rocky mountains and as such the country was not inaccessible. It could neither present great obstacles to the construction of a good road from Rondupara into the independent Garo country.

March against Ribugiri Village, 1848 :

From Rondupara to Ribugiri was a distance of six miles. The road winds along by the side of the Ringge river and then over a small hill till it meets the same Ringge river. The lands for miles around have been cleared for jhum cultivation and so their march was more cheerful than before as they had a fine view of the surrounding country.

On his way, Belli heard that the Ribugiri Garos had barricaded the road in several places and planted it thickly with sharp bamboo spikes, but as Belli could not identify the exact position of these ambuscades, he persuaded the Nokmas to act as guides and show them the road. Accordingly, the Nokmas marched in front of the sepoy for about 40 yards. Everyone of them armed with a mil-am or two-edged sword, shield and spear and in this manner they had marched about 4 miles or more, when the leading Garos showed symptoms of uneasiness, and one by one gave up their positions, and at last they all came to a dead halt and refused to advance any further. Belli then drew them up on the side of the hill, and the main sepoy

stepped up to the front and commenced picking its way through the sharp bamboo spikes to the bottom of the deep ravine into which the road dived, and no sooner did the leading files commence the ascent on the opposite side than the sepoy were saluted with a shower of darts and stones thrown by a party of Garos from behind the barricade across the road. The descent and ascent into and out of the ravine was through dense jungle and the sepoy had no opportunity of getting a fair view of their enemies, but a number of well directed volleys right and left made the place too hot for the Garos and the leading sepoy having demolished the palisade, they rushed through in pursuit but the Garos had vanished. Lieut. Belli and his party then proceeded on to the village which was about half a mile from the spot. In fact, Belli expected to meet with serious opposition, but whether the Garos were more severely hit by volleys of fire or had lost some of their leaders, there was no more opposition. On entering the village, it was found deserted, though every preparation had been made for resistance. The village itself was stockaded and the only approach to it along the precipitous banks of the Ringge river had been blocked up with felled trees and the path planted with sharp bamboo and wooden stakes for a distance of about 200 yards, and the side of the road inland for upwards of 40 or 50 paces. The sepoy then shaved off the stakes even with the ground, as they had been planted so deep that they could not extract them as they were compelled to cut the trees to pieces and remove. The party had some kukuris and kodalis with which they removed the stakes and that took about an hour and a half getting over 200 yards of road.

As there was no hope of inducing the Garos to surrender after numerous proclamations to them, offering pardon and forgiveness to all except the murderers, who would come in and give themselves up unconditionally, and as the Garos appeared to Belli to require a severe example for their contumacy in attacking the sepoy, Belli directed the destruction of the Ribugiri village and its defences by burning and after binding down the Nokmas to seize and forward to him the offenders, the party commenced their retreat to the plains.

Retreat to Rondupara :

After destroying the village of Ribugiri and giving orders for apprehending the leaders, Belli and his party retreated to Rondupara. On their arrival at Rondupara, Capt. Reynolds regaled the Nokmas who accompanied them with a good dinner and lots of liquor which they seemed to have enjoyed. However, Monkual and his brother-in-law, though fond of such a carouse, went to Belli's camp early and slept there during the night as they had done since his arrival as a kind of hostage for the good behaviour of their people.⁵

Thus the expedition was a success without any loss of life from the British side except that Belli got injured on his thumb as did one of the sepoy. Another had his breastplate embased. On the part of the Garos, it was not possible to estimate their losses. They never allowed their dead or wounded to lay on the ground but shrunk off with them in the jungles. But since the British troops made some rounds of gun shots, all of them might not have

escaped.⁶ According to the people of Rondupara, about 40 to 50 British soldiers met their death during these expeditions mostly at the narrow path down the ravine where the Garos struck them with missiles of big stones hurled from the top of the hill.⁷ But Major Davidson in his official report states that out of six Europeans who entered these areas only one day, four died.⁸

On the following morning, Capt. Reynolds, Lieut. Belli and the party returned to Bangalkhata after very exhaustive expeditions but with satisfaction on their success in bringing these parts of the A-beng areas under their control. The Nokmas accompanied the party to Bangalkhata and entered into an agreement with Capt. Reynolds. According to this, the Nokmas undertook to abstain from committing murders either in their own clan or in any other, and to abandon the custom of hanging human skulls in their houses. They also undertook to settle all disputes with the help of a Panchayat and in the presence of the parties involved, failing, they would report the matter to the Hat Mohurer to be decided by the Magistrate. Then whenever any Government servant travelled through their Mahal, the Nokmas would clear the roads and furnish them with coolies and render them every possible assistance and attend any government officer having been so summoned. They also agreed to prevent the independent Garos from entering into Company's territory through their villages with an intention of murder or create any disturbances. Whenever any officer of the Government would arrive at the Mahal and ask them to pay revenues, they agreed to pay without delay. The Nokmas also agreed to maintain the roads from

Bhajamara to Kantananggiri and Bangalkhata to Ribugiri throughout their respective jurisdictions. They also agreed to deliver up the murderers to the thana within their elakas. Having accomplished this important task, Capt. Reynolds and Belli along with the detachment of police returned to Goalpara.⁹

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CHAPTER - II

LAST ARMS STRUGGLES BY THE **A·BENGs,1881.**

Captain Reynold's expeditions in 1848 against Rondupara and the neighbouring villages could not bring permanent peace in those areas. Rather it only poked the hornet's nest as the practice of murders, killings and burning of villages continued unabated in those A·beng areas. But these atrocities were committed by the individual Nokmas and villages against their enemies. Several military campaigns were conducted by British officers like Dalton, Capt. W. Agnew, Henry Driver, Lt. Macdonell, W.C.A. Becket, etc., but the situation got worse. However, there was no combined arms struggles against the British until the year 1881.

The occasion was the demand for labour by the British to construct a road from Tura to Bangalkhata through the A·beng areas in the year 1881. The affected areas contained several villages inhabited by the Burmese who were locally known as Mans, Rabhas, Hajongs and Bengalis but the whole area was known generally as Bangalkhata.

To the south of Bangalkhata were the A·beng Garos inhabiting the lands lying between the Didak river on the east, Rampani river on the west, the plains on the north

and on the south, the Ribugiri village.

The table below gives the names of disturbed villages, names of Laskers, Nokmas and estimated population within this tract :-

Name of village - Name of Lasker - Name of Nokma - Estimated population			
Hamongiri	- Mala	- Barang	- 220
Jangrapara	- Thorin	- Mongran	- 207
Rondupara	- "	- Marsin	- 306
Makalpara	- "	- Shingrang	- 137
Ribugiri	- "	- Dikka	- 110
Bikonggiri	- "	- Chanda	- 04
Cherangiri	- "	- Khethong	- 106
Rongshagiri	- "	- Thorin	- 191
Boldakgiri	- "	- Aban	- 115
Dabugiri	- "	- Rongkha	- 235
Total			- 1631

Reasons for Uprising :

Major H.J. Peet, Deputy Commissioner of Garo Hills, 1878-81, attributed the uprisings to the neglect of the British Government officials in visiting this tract of A-beng country. Except those military expeditions against these areas during 1822-25; 1832-35; 1847-48 and a visit to Ribugiri by survey officer in 1873-74, there had been no contact with the people of these areas by the British officials. The chief causes of this neglect were two. First, these parts of

the Garo country lie in an out-of-the-way corner with no route through it to any place of importance. The only route to these areas were through the watershed of rivers and a series of steep hills.

The second cause was that though these people frequented the Bangalkhata market, they had the reputation of being sullen and intractable and kept to themselves completely so as to have been almost forgotten. Few of them like the Lasker and Nokmas occasionally came to Tura but after settling all cases with the District officers, returned quietly to their villages. Therefore, so long as the revenues were paid punctually, everything else was left practically in the hands of the villagers themselves.

Third cause also existed, namely, the inclusion of several permanently settled estates which formerly belonged to Goalpara by Mr. Becket in 1873-74. This has entailed a settlement of plain lands on the Assam Ryotwary system and extensive surveys of the boundaries. Therefore, it has become difficult for the Deputy Commissioner to do justice to the hills when part of his time had to be devoted to the plains.

Another cause of the then excitement was that the Garos have been allowed to carry swords and spears, and do habitually carry them. Possessions of these weapons as part of their properties and as part of their travelling kits emboldened them to meet any eventuality. Ignorant of the British power and of the effect of modern firearms, the Garos exaggerated their own strength and the practice of always carrying weapons must have tended to foster

and preserve what martial spirit they naturally possessed. Major Peet believes that the Garo are no cowards, though they are not exactly warlike. It would doubtly be impossible to disarm the District now without creating very angry feelings and probably an outbreak. On the other hand, some officers of experience think that the weapons are absolutely necessary to the people for the purpose of defence against wild animals. Major Peet thinks that if the Garos were absolutely weaponless, it would not have been possible for them to actually prepare for active opposition as the sequel has shown them to have done.

The Immediate Cause :

The immediate cause of the uprising is as follows :- The zamindar of Mechpara, a part of whose estate lies in the Garo Hills District, sanctioned Rs. 1800/- in 1879 to the Garo Hills District Fund for construction of a road between Tura and Bangalkhata. Therefore, D.C. appointed an overseer named Chandra Nath Moitro, to conduct the work. He commenced cutting a trace from Tura on the 2nd December, 1880 and reached Bangalkhata by the end of December. He cut the line (jungle clearing only) entirely with Garo labour, the villages of Darangiri, Dilmagiri, Soragiri, Sharapgiri, Mandagiri, Dalupara, Sadolpara, Mangsangiri, Ramgiri and Robongiri, each giving a few men who worked from one to four days. On the 11th January, 1881, he commenced widening and constructing the road from Bangalkhata end. The D.C. issued Parwana to the overseer to request Thorin Lasker, Thangon Lasker and Ranga Mandol of Bangalkhata to furnish labourers. But Thorin

Lasker who was sent by the overseer on the 8th January, 1881 to Rondupara and other villages in his jurisdiction, came back to the overseer on the 11th January, 1881 and told him that not only the people refused to work but that they had also threatened to beat him. Jenang and Botia, Thorin's Sardar and interpreter who went with him, corroborated the statement. The overseer then sent Thorin Lasker to the D.C. who explained to him the purpose of the road and told him to give his share of labour. He went back to Bangalkhata on the 20th January, 1881 and induced Najokgiri, Bandugiri, Morongiri, Machapara and Chambakpara, five of his villages to work and they each supplied a few men, who worked each four days. Subsequently, other villages of Thorin's elaka, viz., Chanapara, Boldokgiri, Chanangpara, Rompani and Magupara also worked each for four days and upto 1st March, 1881, Wadokgiri, one of Thorin's elaka villages also worked for four days.

But Thorin Lasker was afraid to go to Rondupara and other disturbed villages alone. He however, went on the 25th February, 1881 with two police constables, four Burmese (Mans) and three of his own men. They returned next day and on 27th February reported to the overseer that there was a huge gathering of Garos at Rondupara and that Rondupara and all the neighbouring villages absolutely refused to work and threatened violence if any attempt was made to force them. On hearing this news, the overseer, Mauzadar who happened to be at Bangalkhata at that time and Thorin Lasker submitted reports to the D.C.. In order to discover the real facts, the D.C. sent out his office Interpreter, Mada by name, to

Rondupara. Mada reached Chanangpara on 2nd March, 1881 and then to Rondupara on the 3rd March, accompanied by the Mauzadar, Dil Muhammad, four constables and seven Burmese, Thorin Lasker and his three men. They stopped at Chisikgiri for the night and next morning sent on Ron, the son of Chisikgiri Nokma to Rondupara. He returned with the news that there was a large meeting and that the people said that they would not work and would resist if necessary but the Mauzadar might come and talk if he liked. So they went and were received with the assurance that the Garos would not work and that they will kill the first man who touched one of them, and were prepared to kill the Deputy Commissioner or any of his officers. They also threatened to prevent other villages working or punish them if they did so. They had to return and Mada went straight to Tura with the news, arriving on the 5th March, 1881. This news reached the plains people who also refused to work for fear of the Garos and even the overseer had to withdraw from Bangalkhata. The D.C. received the news on the 6th March while camping at Putimari and reaching Tura next morning, commenced preparations to visit Rondupara. At first, he sent Thorin Lasker to Rondupara with an ultimatum to the effect that if the Nokmas of the disturbed villages would not come at once to explain their grievances, the D.C. would advance and they would have to bear the consequences.

On the 8th March, 1881, it was reported to D.C. that Bangalkhata was threatened by the Garos. The D.C. then asked the D.C. of Goalpara to send fifty of his Frontier Police there to give confidence to the people. Meanwhile,

many of the Hajong and Rabha inhabitants of Bangalkhata had fled towards Salmara. But the D.C. of Goalpara promptly sent fifty Frontier Police under the District Superintendent of Police and thus restored confidence amongst the panick-stricken people.

Major Peet, the D.C. of Garo Hills also collected one hundred police and their rations and commenced his march on the 13th March, 1881 with 207 coolies. He carried ten days' rations (about 3000kgs) for 300 men and 100 rounds of ammunitions in boxes in addition to sixty rounds carried by each men in pouch. He was accompanied by Mr. C.A. Fisher, Assistant Commissioner and Superintendent of Police and by Mr. W.R. Fisher, Assistant Conservator of Forests.

On the 13th March, Major Peet and his party reached the deserted village of Alagiri and prepared huts for the night. Nothing happened at night but the D.C. was told in the morning that two strange Garos had appeared at daybreak, looked at them and quietly went off. On the 14th March, they reached Waramgiri without any notable event. Here they reduced the load of the ration as the arms and ammunitions were too heavy and made Sangning Nokma in charge of the left out ration who later sent them to Tura. On the 15th March, they reached Dadengiri located in the vicinity of Ribugiri, the most southernly of the disturbed villages. The D.C. found it difficult to get guides, because it was almost a religion with Garos not to show the way to a stranger the village in troublous times, for the villagers so discovered will never forgive the people who showed the path. But somehow or other, they reached

the Ribugiri fields where few men were seen, but they began to run away as soon as they saw the police. The advanced guard led by W.R. Fisher pursued the fleeing Garos and after a hot chase, overtook four men, one of them being the Nokma named Dikka. All of them had swords in their hands. After interrogation, Dikka Nokma and his three men freely admitted that the combination of Garo villages had refused to work but said that Rondupara had instigated it.

Major Peet and his party encamped on a cleared hill that night, during which there was a severe storm which put them into great inconveniences. Next Morning, the Nokma was inflicted a fine of many fowls as he did not come to see the D.C. The D.C. then took the Nokma with him and marched towards Rondupara. The Nokma Dikka and his three men were released on condition that they bring all the weapons of the village before the D.C. which they brought a certain number before the D.C started for Rondupara.

Rondupara was a large village of four Paras or hamlets, each had its own Nokma. The chief Nokma of the whole Rondupara village, as well as his own Para was Marsin A·gitok Sangma, whose name was the terror of the inhabitants of Bangalkhata and its neighbourhood. The mixed population living in the plain belts in and around Bangalkhata was shrilled with fear at the approach or even the rumour of the approach of Marsin and used to run away to safer places deserting their own villages. Such was the influence of and panick created by Marsin and his Rondupara village. Rondupara village consisted

of about 67 houses, out of which about 40 houses belonged to Marsin's Para or locality.

When Major Peet and his party arrived at Rondupara, Marsin and few of his men were found sitting quietly, some in front of their houses, while some in the open space in the centre of the village. None of the Rondupara villagers showed any sign of reception and nobody greeted them. They were completely ignored. Everyone remained quiet and indifferent.

As soon as Major Peet was able to identify Marsin, he caused him to be brought before him. Then thorough interrogations followed. Marsin did not go round the bush and frankly admitted the whole story of the combination to disobey orders. However, he excused himself by saying that he was powerless to influence his people at that point of time and pointed out that it was one leader named Chamra, Nokma of Hamongiri village who was the chief instigator of the whole affair. As Marsin was present to explain the whole excitement to him, Peet did not inflict any fine either on Marsin or on Rondupara village, but simply ordered the whole village to surrender its arms or else face the consequences.

Hearing the order, the Garos present there immediately vanished into the jungle. There was no sign or inkling to surrender. Then Major Peet and his team searched every house and got some weapons including a gun. In the jungle near the village, Major Peet found some swords and shields lately repaired. He then saw a newly cleaned sword stuck in the roof of the Nokpante or

Bachelors' House, where Peet sat for sometime and took out the sword and placed it by his side. Then immediately one of the villagers who had not gone away, tried to snatch it away as he passed Major Peet in an apparently casual way but was at once prevented by the sentry.

Hearing that another Para or locality of Rondupara being rather doubtful after the signs Major Peet had seen in Marsin's locality, whether or not opposition was intended, Peet proceeded there immediately taking Marsin with him. Before starting Major Peet and his Interpreter shouted to the people, whom they knew to be close by in the jungle, that their houses would be spared if they delivered up their arms, otherwise they would be burnt.

Major Peet next went to another Para or locality of Rondupara village, which is smaller than Marsin's. The houses were found nearly empty, and some paddy being left. Here Peet went through the same course of shouting and at last, the Nokma, Bangam by name, appeared before him. Peet then fined the Nokma with baskets of rice for not welcoming him. Bangam Nokma also admitted the combination of many villages against British and told Peet that he could not help himself, all the villages in that neighbourhood having bound themselves not to work on any consideration.

Reinforcement from Goalpara :

While thus Peet was negotiating with Bangam Nokma, he heard the bugles of the Goalpara Police under Mr. Goad, District Superintendent, who had come up on Peet's request.¹

Mr. J.H. Goad, District Superintendent of Police, Goalpara in his report to Deputy Commissioner of Goalpara, letter No. 214, dated Dhubri, 19th April, 1881, mentioned that he arrived with his detachment of police at Bangalkhata (Manpara) on the 9th March, 1881, and next morning and every succeeding morning, he despatched patrols to the front. He received no information of any importance from these patrols as they did not meet any Garos until the 16th March, 1881, when he sent out a stronger patrol than usual, with orders to endeavour to communicate with Chisikgiri, a village not in line with other Garo villages. The officer-in-command of this patrol party returned and reported that he had not been able to reach Chisikgiri, as he had met two Garos near a track leading to Bikonggiri village and these two Garos were running about carrying bill-hooks and cutting down small trees and placed them across the path leading to Bikonggiri village, the way the party wanted to proceed to Chisikgiri. One of the men of the patrol was a Garo who called out these two Garos but they did not reply and ran on. On seeing this, the officer changed the route, leaving Bikonggiri to his right and proceeded by shorter path to Chisikgiri. On the way, he met the Nokma of Chisikgiri and three Garos of that village and on questioning them, the Nokma said that the Garos were much irritated at being forced to cut the new road but that his village was not one amongst them. The officer did not proceed to Chisikgiri but returned to camp.

At Manpara there was a great scare among the people at threats by Marsin, Nokma of Rondupara and this fear of being attacked was only subdued on their

seeing Mr. Goad and his police force. Mr. Goad and his police force marched to Rondupara on the 17th March, 1881, passing through Chisikgiri and joined Major Peet there shortly after.²

According to Mr. Campbell's report to the Chief Commissioner of Assam, dated 23rd April, 1881, he received prior report on the 8th March, 1881 at about 3 or 4 P.M. that some Hajong and Rabha villagers of Dewankhata and other villagers near Bangalkhata in Garo Hills had left their homes from fear of the Garos and were living under trees and in cow-houses in some villages near Salmara of Goalpara district. Therefore, Mr. Campbell deemed it expedient to make immediate arrangements for supporting Major Peet with as large as armed police force as he could collect. He then directed Mr. Goad to cross over with his police force at daybreak on the following morning. Arrangements were also made for a local Doctor to accompany the force with a supply of medicines and instruments.

At daybreak, on the 19th March, 1881, Mr. Campbell, D.C. of Goalpara crossed over along with Mr. Goad and 58 rank and file, halting at Salmara which is three miles from Bangalkhata market. He at once sent for some of the people who were reported to have left their villages in the Garo Hills. About 5 or 6 men came, while the rest were women and children who were too timid to appear and some men returned to see their deserted homesteads.

Mr. Campbell questioned the men who appeared

before him as to the cause of their fright. They replied that they were required to work on a new road but some of the Garos of the inner hills had sent them word, and had also told them at market-days, not to work on the road and if they did, all the Hajongs and the Rabhas would be killed. They further said that on one hand, they were unable to refuse to work as coolies, while on the other, they had to protect themselves from the Garos. Therefore, they thought it best to remove their women and children into the Goalpara district for safety and to await events. Besides this party, there were refugees scattered in other villages.

As it was wednesday, the day on which the Bangalkhata hat was held, Mr. Campbell went along with Goad to the market. They met several Bengalis, Hajongs and Rabhas on the way but were informed that there had been an entire absence of Garos of the inner hills at the market. Then Campbell proceeded beyond the market and crossed the river hoping to converse with some Garos of a hamlet with four or five houses. There were several men and women in front of their houses but on seeing Campbell, they all ran away into dense jungle near the village. Some people who spoke Garo and who accompanied Campbell and who knew some of them personally, called them by name and requested them to come out and speak to Campbell. However, they refused to come out of the jungle as they feared that they might be forced to work as coolies or take them away somewhere and they preferred to remain in the jungles. It was of course useless for Campbell to follow them into the jungle as the hill was steep and the undergrowth dense and

impenetrable even for an elephant and so Campbell and his party simply came away to Dhubri as some urgent works were being awaited there.

Mr. Campbell left the police force at Salmara under Mr. Goad but the force was moved to Bangalkhata on the 10th March, 1881 and halted there. As the combination of the A·bengs was uncertain as to what direction it would take, Mr. Campbell engaged people to construct a cart-track to Bangalkhata. This track consisted of only two lines to mark it out in ploughed-fields, but for four or five miles near Bangalkhata, a good deal of earth-work and levelling of approaches was made so that if police operations were prolonged, this cart-track would have proved most useful in sending supplies.

On the 16th March, 1881, Mr. Campbell returned to Bangalkhata from Dhubri to inspect Goad's camp. Meanwhile he had an interview with some headmen of the colony of descendants of Burmese settled in and around Bangalkhata. The information obtained from them tallied with the rumours that the Garos were in a disaffected, sullen, unsettled condition, caused by the demands on them for labour. Campbell also interviewed some friendly Garo Laskers who all concurred that the Garos did not object so much to working as porters or cutting jungles but they objected to digging earth with a spade as the sudden contract of the tool with the earth when they worked disturbed the spinal column and shook their brains.

When the patrol party returned to the camp at about

3 P.M, the Head Constable of the patrol party who was a Garo informed Campbell that the placing of newly-cut trees or twigs across a pathway was intended to warn people frequenting the path that they do so at their own risk.

As Campbell was about to leave Goad's camp for Dhubri, a Garo messenger handed out a letter written by Peet from Dadengiri to him saying that he expects a great opposition from the combination of Garo villages.³

Major Peet's and Goad's combined operations :

Major Peet and Mr. Goad met at Rondupara on the 17th March, 1881 without either party encountering any stiff opposition.⁴ But Major Peet reported that from all the signs he saw, he had no doubt in his mind that resistance was intended but their combined forces were too strong for anything of the kind. In the course of the day, Marsin's Para brought in their arms and so did the other Para where they were staying. Major Peet sent several people of Thorin Lasker to the other two Paras, but neither the Nokmas nor the arms were coming in. So Major Peet resolved to visit them next day.

Accordingly, on the 18th March, 1881, Major Peet started with Goad and half the force, leaving the rest under Mr. C.A. Fisher, Assistant Commissioner and Superintendent of Police, to guard the camp. They visited both the Paras, one of which lies on the left, the other on the right bank of Ringge river. Both were completely empty as every household article including grains having

been removed. They waited at each Para for about an hour by sending people out as far as was safe into the jungle to call the villagers. His messages were loud and clear that the Nokmas should appear and state his grievances and that the arms should be produced before him. But there was no response from any of the Paras. Therefore, as a punishment for their obstinacy and rebellious nature, Major Peet burnt all the houses of the two Paras reducing them to ashes. The Garos on their part could not dare to come out and confront them openly as the police force was too strong for them. Therefore, Major Peet inflicted such a severe punishment on the Garos that he had the desired effect as soon the Nokmas of those two destroyed Paras, namely, Rading and Singing came in with their arms and offering of fowls and other gifts.

On the 19th March, 1881, Major Peet again went out with Mr. Goad and fifty police force and visited Jangrapara (this village should not be confounded with another Jangrapara situated east of the Didak river). The Nokma of Jangrapara, Chandal by name, gave himself up and admitted the combination and produced the arms. He was asked to bring up some of the men and women of his village when Major Peet explained to them the absurdity of their conduct and then released the village as they were overawed by Rondupara. Peet then returned to Rondupara.

On the night of 19th March, 1881, a severe storm occurred and many police personnel became ill with severe cold and fever. As the water at Rondupara was not sufficient for all the large number of police force, they left for

Bangalkhata and reached on the evening of the 20th March, 1881.

Soon some villages not implicated in the combination came to Major Peet and gave up their arms. Major Peet kept the shields, as they are not required to protect them against wild animals but returned the swords and spears to mark the differences between loyal and disloyal villages.

March to Hamongiri Village :

On the 21st March, 1881, Major Peet and Mr. Goad marched with 100 of all ranks, partly Garo Hills and partly Goalpara Frontier police, to Hamongiri village. As there had been heavy rain, this was a severe march. The route took them through Cherangiri and Rongshagiri.

Hamongiri was a large village scattered in several hamlets. When the invading force arrived at the Hamongiri village, the whole village was deserted, every house being quite empty. People were seen only on the hills around them. Major Peet made every effort to induce the Nokma, Barang by name, to come forward with the arms of the villages. The Lasker and the Mauzadar who accompanied the expeditionary force and who acted as the Interpreter, went to the edge of the jungle and called out but could get no reply of any kind. Major Peet gave them till 8 o'clock next morning to consider the matter. However, instead of bowing to Major Peet's orders, many armed men were seen on the hill opposite the police camp, apparently having already prepared to meet any challenges. Once again, Major Peet made offers to come

in and produce their arms but there was absolutely no response from the people of Hamongiri. Therefore, Major Peet having found no other alternative, once again used his tactics of burning the whole deserted village sparing only one Para which was small and may have been coerced by the rest. In this Hamongiri village, a man Chamra by name lived whom everyone acclaimed as a great patriot and a hero and who was said to have been at the bottom of the move to oppose the British. Major Peet sent men from Rondupara to call Chamra and bring him but these messengers reported to Peet that the people of Hamongiri and Rongshagiri rescued Chamra from their hands and hence he could not be produced before him.

Surrender of Garo Villages :

On his way to Hamongiri, Major Peet left friendly Garos behind at Cherangiri and Rongshagiri to hunt up and communicate with the people who had deserted their villages. In effect, some of them came in and made submission on Major Peet's return to Rongshagiri on the 22nd March, 1881, where he stopped for the night.

From Rongshagiri Peet marched to Bangalkhata on 23rd March and remained there till 28th March, 1881 during which period, Garos of the neighbouring villages came in and expressed their willingness to obey orders.

Major Peet continued to send men after men to get in Chamra, and on the evening of the 27th March, 1881, he was brought in by Ginrang, Sardar of Waribokgre, who induced him to come in peacefully.

Major Peet left for Dhubri on the 28th March, 1881 but returned to Bangalkhata on the 30th March, 1881. Then he sent back to Tura Mr. C.A. Fisher and 50 policemen on the 28th March and reached Tura by the Rompani road on the 30th March, 1881.

Major Peet went out and inspected the Stockade at Bangalkhata on the 1st April, 1881 and then tried to reach Rondupara but was too weak from recent illness to proceed further and so returned to Bangalkhata.

On the 2nd and 3rd April, 1881, there was heavy storms which prevented Major Peet anything being done beyond an inspection of the new road.

Surrender of Hamongiri Nokma :

On the evening of the 3rd April, 1881, Barang, Nokma of Hamongiri came to Major Peet with some arms. He was the last of the men Major Peet wanted to see. On thorough questioning, Barang Nokma also frankly confessed everything. And as everything seemed to be quiet then, Major Peet released him after cautioning him for the future.

Construction of a Stockade at Bangalkhata :

While Major Peet was at Bangalkhata keeping himself busy in restoring law and order, he also selected a site and commenced to build a Stockade three or four miles south of Bangalkhata by the bank of the Ringge river, where he proposed to place 20 police in order to give confidence to the Plainspeople. The Stockade was built

entirely by the people of the lately disturbed villages who also made good road to it from Bangalkhata. The Stockade was garrisoned on the 8th April, 1881.

Major Peet's final settlement with Rondupara Nokmas and other Nokmas :

On the 4th April, 1881, Major Peet went with 20 police personel to Marsin's Para or locality of Rondupara. He had previously sent notice about his visit. Therefore, wife of Marsin and a number of men and women were gathered to meet him. Major Peet talked with them for a long time, thereby giving an opportunity to them to see a white man face to face for the first time. Marsin's wife narrated the story of the great meetings at Rondupara where the people of all the neighbouring villages were also present and engaged in heated discussions by demonstrating their spirit of patriotism and ready to sacrifice their lives in resisting the dictates of outside forces. They did not want any interference in their way of life but she declared that her husband did his best to induce the people to obey orders.

The Deputy Commissioner of Garo Hills heard rumours before he marched from Tura to Rondupara on the 12th March, 1881, which induced him to take the direct route via Ribugiri, instead of that usually followed via Rompani, which was confirmed by the Nokma of Chisikgiri who said that a body of armed men variously calculated at from 200 to 400 strong had assembled on or near the Rompani road, with a view to oppose his advance.

When Major Peet questioned the Rondupara people

on this rumour, they admitted everything and offered to show him the place where the stand was to be made. Major Peet slept at Rondupara that night and on the 5th April, 1881, marched to Makhalpara. Here were assembled about 100 men, women and children to meet the D.C. Then the D.C., Major Peet explained to them the policy of the Government. After that they parted apparently good friends, though this was the very spot where they were to have been attacked. The Nokma of Makhalpara and others admitted that it was thought that Major Peet would come by the Rompani route to Balupara and then march on to Ribugiri via Makhalpara but, finding that Peet was going straight to Ribugiri, the combined Garo forces broke up and dispersed to their villages. They also admitted that it was their intention to fight rather than work. The Nokma of Makhalpara estimated the gathering of armed men to have been 400 strong and said that all the disturbed villages sent these fighting men fully armed.

Major Peet, D.C. of Garo Hills then went on to Bikonggiri where he met again several people. He halted there for an hour or two, explaining the folly of their resistance move, who agreed and told him that they were bewitched when they resolved to stand up against their guns.

Major Peet returned the same day to Bangalkhata and stayed there till the 9th April, 1881, when he left for Dhubri. Before Peet left for Dhubri, the Nokma of Hamongiri told him that his people were rebuilding their houses. He further told him the reason why he allowed his village to be burned rather than surrender, for he feared

that he would be shot by police for having attended the assembly at Makhalpara.

Now that all was quiet, Major Peet released all the Nokmas of the disturbed villages whom he had detained except the following four Nokmas who were considered to be the ring-leaders and the main instigators of the whole resistance movement.

One of them was Marsin, the first Nokma of Rondupara whom Major Peet considered to be the top most leader and in whom he had still no trust.

The other two were Chamra, Nokma of Hamongiri and Akhela, Nokma of one Para of Rondupara A-king, as there was a consensus of opinion that these two Nokmas were among the chief instigators of the movement. The fourth person to be detained was one Chandra by name, an Interpreter to Mala Laskar. He was arrested and sent to Tura on the same charges. Thus Marsin, Chamra, Akhela and Chandra were retained in the Tura jail until the Chief Commissioner's orders were received.⁵

At the time of these military expeditions against the A-beng Garos, the Chief Commissioner of Assam, Mr. C.A. Elliott was on a tour in the Naga Hills, but before he left Kohima, news had reached him of the collapse of the resistance. So he left for Dhubri on the 16th April, 1881, accompanied by Major Peet and by Capt. W.J. Williamson, the first Deputy Commissioner of Garo Hills who was there for many years and knew more of the Garos than any officer in the province and now the Inspector-General of

Police. They marched from Bangalkhata through the scene of the recent disturbances to Tura. In the course of this tour he had many opportunities of conversing with the people who had lately been rebellious and examining them as to the causes of their conduct, as to any grievance they might have to complain of, and as to the acts they have committed.

At Tura, the Chief Commissioner called up and examined the four political detainees kept by Major Peet, namely, Marsin, Akhela, Chamra and Chandra. After thorough interrogation, the Chief Commissioner passed orders to the Deputy Commissioner saying that "unless anything fresh comes out in evidence against them, they should be released and pardoned, subject only to the condition that they present themselves periodically, once or twice a month at headquarters to report the condition of affairs in their villages and to enable the Deputy Commissioner to satisfy himself that they are behaving peaceably and well." The Chief Commissioner expressed the hope that these orders will be approved by the Government of India.⁶

On the receipt of the letter of the Chief commissioner of Assam, the Government of India replied on June 18th, 1881, saying, "your instructions to Major Peet as to the disposal of the ring leaders in the disturbances and the terms on which you proposed to permit the Garos in the more turbulent villages to retain possession of their arms, are approved by the Government of India"

In view of the approval of the Government of India

for the release of the four prisoners, we can take it for granted that the four Garo ringleaders, namely Marsin (the Garos call him Malsin), the Chief Nokma of Rondupara, Akhela, the Nokma of one Para or locality of Rondupara, Chamra, the Nokma of Hamongiri and Chandra, an Interpreter to Mala Lasker have been released from jail soon after the D.C. of Garo Hills received the order on conditions that they would report to the D.C. once or twice a month about the state of affairs of their respective villages and about themselves till the D.C. is fully satisfied that they no longer posed any threat to the peace and tranquility in their areas. After they were released from Tura jail, there is no record available to tell us about their lives and activities. However, from all the available official Records, Files, Documents, etc., it was found that there was no more organised armed rebellion by the Garos after these eventful uprisings.

References :-

1. Major Peet's Report to the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam, No. 392 dated Tura the 22nd April, 1881.
2. Mr. H.J. Goad's Report to the Deputy Commissioner, Goalpara, No. 214 dated Dhubri, the 19th April, 1881.
3. Report of Mr. A.C. Campbell, Deputy Commissioner, Goalpara, to the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner, No. 98 dated Dhubri, the 23rd April, 1881.
4. Ibid.

5. Major Peet's Report to the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam, No.392 dated Tura the 22nd April, 1881.
6. Report from C.J. Lyall, officiating Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam, to the Secretary to the Government of India, Home Revenue and Agriculture Departments, No.187, dated Shillong, 2nd May, 1881.
7. From Hon'ble C. Grant, officiating Secretary to the Government of India, Home, Revenue and Agriculture Departments, No. 170, dated Simla, 18th June, 1881.

CHAPTER - III

CONCLUSION

The A·bengs are one of the divisions of the Garo tribe who inhabit the whole of western Garo Hills and a few villages in the south-eastern part of Garo Hills. In area and population, they are the largest amongst all the Divisions of the Garo tribe. Yet, they were dubbed by their other Garo brethren as the most uncivilised and backward. As such, any child with unseemly behavior used to be scolded by the parents or relatives as the A·beng. The British on their part, tried to preserve the life and culture of the A·bengs and their areas in their original settings even without allowing the Christian Missions to venture into their areas and work. In effect, they remained uneducated and backward until India became independent. Only after India attained independence, the Missions entered into these areas and opened schools and introduced several developmental works.

Thus, though the A·bengs were at the bottom in the social scale, only few knew that they were the first among the Garos to have stood up against the British for the cause of preservation of their independent life and culture. On the other hand, the British without having any regard to A·bengs sensitivities, tried to intrude into their territories and bring them under their control by

imposing taxes upon them and by demanding their surrender to its Government. The A-bengs reacted to this violently and initially refused to pay any taxes and to surrender their independent authority to any outside power. As a result of this confrontation, a series of warfare broke out between the A-bengs and the British during the greater part of the 19th century. The A-bengs buried the hatchet of their traditional inter-clan and inter-village feuds and combined for the first time ever to safeguard the independence of their country and their culture.

It was not that the whole A-beng Division of the Garo tribe who rose up in arms against the British but only those A-bengs who inhabited within the areas mentioned below who took up arms against the British during 1822-1881. These A-beng areas were bounded on the south-west by the Kolongkini river, and to the east by the Gograh river which descends from Garo Hills. To the south, bounded then by the country of the independent Garos and to the north, by the Singimari to Tikrikilla regions.

While analysing the reasons for opposition of the A-bengs, the British officials attributed the cause to the savaged nature of the A-bengs by branding them as savages, obstinate and contumacious. Therefore, officially the British Government took them as wild, disobedient and rebellious people and adopted plans and policies towards them as such. But by going deep down the root cause, it will be found that it was a wrong diagnosis of the disease that prolonged conflicts were ensued and resulted in the shedding of blood of so many people which could have been easily avoided if there had been a correct

diagnosis and correct treatment.

From the narration of the series of encounters between the A·bengs and the British, it was obvious that the British Government went ahead by the official view regarding the cause of the A·beng's resistance. For example, the A·bengs tenaciously resisted the payment of taxes to the British Government as it was not their custom to pay any taxes to any outside authority. But the British Government took this as an affront to their authority and drew up proceedings against those villages that were in arrears of payment of taxes, by burning their villages and by levying fines for their so called contumacy.

It was true that the British summoned the Nokmas, asked them to pay taxes regularly and the Nokmas also signed agreement promising to pay taxes now and in future. But the British officers failed to notice that these promises were made only under duress and threats. The promises were not coming from their hearts. Rather these promises were made by the A·bengs only to avert the trouble and threats if they did not do so. As we can see from the narration of the story of these conflicts that the moment the British officers turned their back from the meetings, the A·bengs shook their hands in defiance.

Had the British understood the genuine feelings of the Garos, they could have adopted different means of approach and that approach should have been one of friendliness and concern for their well-being. In that way, such protracted conflicts and bloodshed could have been easily avoided.

Their hatred for payment of taxes to outside authority was amply clear when the A-bengs went to the extent of killing their own Nokmas or Laskers who tried to collect taxes from them for the British. However, the British became blind to these acts of violence and went by the official view of calling them as obstinate and rebellious tribe and quelling them by force of arms.

Other British officers attributed the acts of violence of the A-bengs against the imposition of taxes to the absence of official visits of the British officers to their villages. Thus the lack of contact was regarded as the cause of rebellion besides their life of isolation.

Possession of their traditional weapons such as, the sword, shield and spear which they carried while travelling was taken by the British officers as incentive to acts of violence.

Another reason for their acts of contumacy was attributed to their refusal to contribute social services by cutting a road from Tura to Bangalkhata. They failed to understand that the Garos never took orders from outside authority. It was not in their custom to do so as it meant to them as underrating their own independence.

The British went by this official stand and followed the policy of imposing upon these independent tribe their own plans and policies without having any regard to their sensitivities and traditional customs and practices.

However, few British officers could well-gauge the basic reason of the protests of the A-bengs against the

imposition of taxes and acts of insubordination. For example, David Scott sent a British contingent against the A·beng villages as they had long thrown off any allegiance to the British. Major Davidson also felt that military action had to be taken due to their acts of insubordination. But Mr. Elliott, the Chief Commissioner of Assam touched the real cause when he said that these disturbances took place due to the display of independence made by these wild and ignorant men. It is a fact that these A·bengs were wild and ignorant but it is also true that they loved independence. From time immemorial, the Nokmas well-guarded their own respective A·kings or Nokma lands. Much blood had been shed in the past in guarding and protecting the sovereignty of their own A·kings which they inherited from their ancestors and were duty-bound to protect and preserve its sovereignty and integrity. Now that sudden interventions were made to wrest that cherished political ideal by an unknown external Agency, they were prepared to guard and protect their independent territories even at the cost of their lives.

Rondupara being one of the largest villages with their Nokmas filled with patriotic spirits, came forward on the scene as the champion of patriotism and heroism throughout these conflicts with the British. Although the Nokmas signed agreements after agreement concurring to pay taxes and to become obedient subjects, they did so as they had no other option. However, they were all eye-washed as the Garos, at the bottom of their hearts longed sincerely for independence and acted recklessly to retain that cherished ideal.

Malsin, the head Nokma of Rondupara A·king, Akhela, the second Nokma of Rondupara, Chamra, the Nokma of Hamongiri A·king and Chandra, the Interpreter came to the forefront in the later stages of their armed struggles against the British as the leaders of the Combination of the Garo forces. And they never surrendered to the British untill they were arrested and put behind bars in Tura jail for several months, for which they never regretted nor asked for pardon as they felt that they committed no wrong.

Though these four leaders and hundreds of A·beng Garos who took part in the fight for independence, were wild and ignorant but their love for independent life and liberty was far greater than even their own lives. Thus, though illiterate, wild and ignorant, they left behind a legacy of true love of their country and its beautiful life to posterity.



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